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THE TEACHING OF INHUMANITY

BY

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THE TEACHING OF INHUMANITY

It is a painful experience to watch in the child the submerging of the first childish tenderness and consideration for the feelings of all sentient creatures, and to note the growth of hardness and selfish indifference to the comfort or discomfort of the brute creation. Yet some such hardening process is the common rule. To many people, indeed, the change is a necessary accompaniment of the mental growth that converts the engaging child into a more useful if less attractive citizen; and regrets for the lost delicacy of feeling are as idly sentimental as for the various other graceful and charming qualities which must be left behind with infancy. But most of those who have closely considered the matter will allow that the change is altogether too sweeping. Life teaches many rough lessons, and the acquisition of a certain callousness of sensibility in a world "red in tooth and claw" is to some extent a needful measure of self-protection. But the brutalising influences to which young minds are subjected go far beyond the necessities of the case. They may be regarded as distinctly retrogressive in tendency, helping to keep back the advance of civilisation.

It frequently happens that men emerge in later life from the callous carelessness of their boyhood. A wider experience of life teaches them sympathy once again, and in middle age they would recoil in horror from many of the cruelties that they committed with light-hearted indiffer-

ence in their youth. Among those who may be termed declared humanitarians there are many who in mature years have returned to those instinctive judgments on questions of right and wrong that belonged to their early years. These men and women had, perhaps at some cost to themselves, overcome what they regarded as undue susceptibility. They had managed to adopt what seemed the sensible and utilitarian standpoint. They had braced themselves to take pleasure in sport, either by persistently banishing from their minds the consideration of the pain it entailed, or by steeling their hearts into positive indifference. But when some chance circumstance forced them to reopen the whole question of the treatment of animals, they found to their surprise that they were bound to condemn many of the practices to which they had given their sanction, and that their mature judgment was much more in accord with the old position of unspoilt childhood than with the newer stage of concurrence with prevailing views. They found that their tolerance, instead of being, as they had supposed, the result of a wider and saner outlook, was simply due to the blunting of the imagination by familiarity with cruel custom, that custom which, as Shelley finely says, "maketh blind and obdurate the loftiest hearts."

In watching the hardening of children's minds under cruel or brutalising influences, we are often startled by the rapidity of the change. The little girl who was made unhappy by the sight of a mouse caught in a trap is heard a few years later boasting that she had been in at the death in the hunting-field; the boy whose grief for the lambs and chickens slaughtered for food seemed to his elders almost morbid in its intensity is found some holiday or another coming home from school with his catapult or air-gun, and with a collection of stuffed birds, to which it is the chief delight of his life to add.

Striking pictures of the instinctive attitude of a child's mind, and of the same mind made callous and cruel by prevailing custom, are found in George Sand's fascinating

autobiography, a book rich in material for the educationalist. The autobiography describes how, during a journey through Spain, when the little Aurore was four years old, her mother stopped at an inn, and pigeons, which were to be killed for the travellers' dinner, were brought into the room. Aurore was so delighted with the birds that one was given to her, but after a short time she grew indignant with her new pet because it would escape from her hands; and hearing that the others were being killed, she insisted, not realising what the words meant, that her pigeon should be killed too. At last, to convince her of her folly, her mother took the child into the kitchen where the killing was in progress. The horror of the impression Aurore never forgot. A pigeon was in the hands of the cook, and she saw the bright life destroyed, and gazed in terror at the dying convulsions of the bird. Shrieks and torrents of tears expressed her feelings, and her only comfort was to find her own pigeon still alive. At dinner, where, as she puts it, the corpses of the pigeons were served up, she naturally refused to touch the food.

A few years later the autobiography shows us a very different Aurore, and we must assume that the change seemed entirely natural to the writer since no explanations or apologies are offered to the reader. So far had the girl profited by the examples offered for her imitation that she could herself sacrifice the bright lives of larks and other birds to pluck and eat their bodies for childish feasts in the woods. Further than this, she organised the destruction of song-birds on a large scale. The village children had been accustomed to make horsehair nets for snares, and Aurore obtained leave from her grandmother for the work to go on in the winter in the château. When the season came the nets were put down, the children visited them with great bags, which they brought back full. The larks were sent into the town to be sold, and the children feasted on the commoner birds.

In reading the autobiography most of us prefer the

picture of the small Aurore in a passion of tears at the fate of the unhappy pigeons to that of the business-like little châtelaine arranging the division of money that the larks brought in, or enjoying the spitting and cooking of singing-birds in the woods. But the change in her was only the change that takes place in the boys and girls growing up around us. The question to be considered is as to what are the influences to which we subject our children that make possible such an alteration; what there is in their experiences that in a few years robs a girl in certain aspects of the tenderheartedness which she is able to preserve in others to the end of her life; that leads a boy to take pleasure in acts which he may blush to remember as a man.

As things are, it seems as if we could not be in too great a hurry to begin the hardening process. Since animals have been among the first objects to awaken the child's intelligent interest one of the first presents to him is a toy horse, and in order to put matters at once on the usual footing, the gift is generally accompanied, in spite of occasional protest, by a toy whip. Even so enlightened an educationalist as Sully mentions the combination as if the two presents went together by nature. As an example of the vivid imagination of childhood, which makes living things of inanimate objects, he instances the boy with a rudely carved "gee-gee," who, "slashing the dull flank with all a boy's glee, looks as if he were realising the joy of actual riding," feeling as if the rough wooden structure "were a very horse." Yet Sully repeatedly urges upon teachers and parents that the impressions made upon children in the early years, before the reasoning powers are active, are of incalculable importance in the building up of character.

Little children as a rule take pleasure in animal companionship, and they are still described as fond of animals, when their fondness has taken the form, as in the case of Tom Tulliver, of a fondness for throwing stones at them.

At a later stage of development of this peculiar form of affection, one has heard time after time of a parent having chosen a butcher's career for his son, because he is "so fond of animals."

We do many cruel things in the name of necessity, and though our consciences are at times troubled at the enormous amount of animal suffering the plea is made to cover, on the whole we are satisfied if no pain is permitted beyond what is unavoidable to gain an object that seems to us important. But surely children ought not to be permitted to be spectators when painful operations are going on, even if in truth these be justifiable. From the brutalising influence of scenes of slaughter in especial, the immature minds of children ought to be protected. In other directions, children are not allowed to witness sights which are too terrible for their years; in this connection society is careless in their protection. In the country everyone seems impatient to hurry on the initiation. In the well-to-do classes, boys are provided at an early stage with nets and setting-boards, and are urged on to the pursuit of butterflies; next they are allowed to accompany the grown-up sportsmen on their milder expeditions for rook-shooting or rabbit-shooting, while rat-hunting is regarded as a specially suitable pastime for their stage of development. Packs of beagles are kept for the enjoyment and training of schoolboys during term, and in the holidays they and their sisters take their places in the hunting-field on their small ponies, or, as they grow strong enough, both join the otter or badger hunt. In the working classes there is the same eagerness to hurry forward the time of the boy's participation in scenes of bloodshed. Among farmers and labourers, boys of tender age are privileged to be present at the pig-killing, or are themselves allowed to drown any cat no longer wanted, and to kill the chicken to be sent to market. In the towns the children of the poor flock round the slaughter-houses, and in districts where public opinion does not effectively

exclude them, the killing of sheep and cattle is one of the exciting prospects of the week. Young and crude minds are often possessed for a craving for sensationalism, and many children have a distinct taste for the horrible. Educationalists may differ as to how far the desire for what is startling may be advantageously directed, but of the brutalising and degrading effects of early familiarity with scenes of mere slaughter there can be no question.

So far for the practical training supplied. On the theoretic side there is no regular provision in our educational system for instilling into children's minds those principles of humanity which might preserve in them a freshness of sympathy, even when the notion of the sacrifice of animal welfare to our own needs had become a familiar thought. In secondary schools much has been done of late years to awaken the minds of the pupils to the marvels of nature, but little to insure that the interest aroused, where it concerns sentient creatures, shall take a humane, as well as scientific, direction. The field naturalists' clubs have a good deal to answer for if they encourage indiscriminately the mania for collecting. The collecting instinct needs careful guidance, since it may be degraded into a mere greediness of acquisition, which takes no account of what is best worthy of observation, and which allows no suffering to stand in the way of its gratification. The new school of naturalists, who stalk animals with field-glass and camera, ought to nave some influence on schoolboys in inculcating finer modes of research than those of wholesale killing.

In elementary schools there is a wide divergence of practice. A very large number of these schools enter every year into competitions in which essays are written or questions are answered, on the subject of kindness to animals, and from the review year by year of the papers of the scholars a good notion may be gained of the instruction given to them. In especial the aims and endeavours of the teachers may be discerned in those

districts where the headmasters or headmistresses are asked to select a number of the best essays in each standard, and where, therefore, only those papers considered the most creditable reach the hands of the examiners. The present writer has had long connection with a district where such a rule prevails—a district so large that this year over 25,000 papers were written for the competition. From the evidence afforded by the essays, it may be gratefully recorded that, in a very large number of schools, excellent lessons on kindness are given as part of the school routine; and, further, that in those schools where teaching as to our duty to animals has been apparently left out of account, or has taken disastrously wrong directions, it is possible to stimulate interest and to introduce reform. Year by year, there has been an encouraging improvement in the papers submitted.

In numerous directions, certainly, reform has been badly needed, for so fundamentally wrong have seemed some of the lessons given, that from time to time examiners have questioned whether they have not been positively pernicious in tendency—whether it would not have been better to leave the children to their own instincts than to urge upon them right treatment of animals from sordid and perverted motives. Evidences of glaringly wrong argument have been of painfully persistent recurrence. Could it be anything but a disastrous mistake, for example, to urge material self-interest as a motive for kindness? In a large number of cases the motive is wholly inoperative, and even where it may apply, it cannot be made the mainspring of action without some lowering of the moral standard. It seems, indeed, only by a singular perversity of judgment that in a class of children an appeal for kindness could be based upon the pecuniary loss entailed on the owner by cruelty. Children are very little concerned with the market value of animals, and to make considerate treatment an affair of profit and loss would seem as futile as it is repellent. Yet the mercantile aspect

has been a favourite theme in some schools. Young writers have frequently urged that if one treats a cow well instead of badly it will give twice as much milk; if one is kind to a horse instead of cruel, it will do twice as much work. One boy writes baldly: "It pays to be kind to domestic animals, because they will work harder, and get stronger and larger, and sell at an increased price than if badly treated." Another boy says: "Cattle that are driven to and from market the master ought to let them take their time, and do not hit them, because it will spoil the meat." "We know that he should be kind to his cattle," says another, "because if he did not the milk would not be so good." Numerous other examples to the same effect might be quoted, but happily such brutal commercialism of tone is growing rarer.

The old idea of man as the pivot of creation, for whose comfort or advancement God made inanimate nature, and in whose interests, rather than in their own, He created animals, still reigns unquestioned in most elementary teaching. To doubt our ability to decide upon God's exact purpose would seem irreligious. Yet for the child as for the adult, must it not be a circumscribing notion to hold that God's care for beast and bird is prompted only by His care for man? A suggestion of the examiners that animals were not here merely for our use proved a hard saying. One scholar managed to reconcile the idea with the tone of more familiar teaching by the pronouncement: "Animals were not created merely for our use, but for our pleasure and food." To most writers they appear an instance, as one child put it, of "God's usual forethought in reference to man." "God created them," says a little girl, with clearness and precision, if with no pedantry of grammar, "for a double purpose, both as a beast of burden and an article of diet." The difficulties in the way of the theory are surmounted with more or less readiness. "All animals do some good," says a writer in Standard IV., "down even to the gnats and

mosquitoes, which perhaps suppress poisonous swellings." One child acknowledges a momentary hesitation when he considers the case of lions and tigers: "To look at these large animals in the Zoological Gardens, they seem to be more hindrance than help. But they are a bit useful: we have their skins for rugs when dead. So we see that everything that God has made is of some use to mankind."

One of His Majesty's late chief inspectors reports a somewhat different view of God's intention in the creation of the higher carnivora. In the course of his duties he heard a lesson given on the lion. Etiquette, he says, demanded that the lesson should conclude with some remarks upon its use. "What is the use of the lion, children?" asked the teacher; and no reply being forthcoming, she herself supplied the correct answer. "The use of the lion is to 'unt. What is the use of the lion, children?" And this second time a ready chorus replied, "To 'unt, teacher." The inspector, after the lesson was concluded, asked the teacher whether she was really of opinion that a beneficent Providence had created the lion on purpose that man should hunt him. Somewhat staggered, she pleaded that this was the use assigned to the lion in the book from which she drew her lesson, and she was actually able to show the inspector the theory in black and white.

It may be asked further how teachers suppose that the sympathetic interest of their pupils is quickened, and their humanity stimulated by the importance given in their lessons to the uses made of the dead bodies of animals. The topic of the carcase, however, has been regarded as so congenial to children's minds, and so improving in its tendency, that it has constantly obtruded itself in the papers on kindness to animals. So little effort is sometimes made to awaken intelligent observation of the animals around him that one boy could write: "Some people seem to think that animals feel no pain or pleasure. Wise men, however, have ascertained otherwise, and have

proven that they can feel pain or pleasure." And another writer had to go far afield for examples of the capacity of animals to suffer. He was satisfied that animals felt pain, because "under pain," he says, "the most savage and ferocious beasts will become calm and docile. A wild cat when in pain will become calm and low in spirits." But while little interest is aroused in the familiar creatures of our homes when alive, enthusiasm is expended on their serviceableness when dead. With wearisome repetition one reads of the beef and mutton and pork we enjoy, of the veal, "which is a delicious food," of the bovril produced, and of the buttons, and so forth, made from the bones of the animals we have domesticated. "The cow," says one child, "when living, gives us milk, and then some of it is churned into butter and cheese. The cow when it is dead gives us beef and cow-heels"; but often the emphasis is entirely on the beef and cow-heels, or their equivalents. "Another useful animal," says another writer, "is the cow; when it is dead its hoofs are made into glue, its horns into knife-handles, etc., and its flesh we eat, and is called beef." In answer to a question asking for examples of the advantage of kindness in training animals for their work, another scholar says: "If you are treating your animals well you will get good things. If you treat your cows well you will get good beef, good milk, and the skin for making leather, and you will get other things. Calves are very useful for veal, and its leather for tops of boots and shoes."*

* At the Royal Agricultural Show held in Liverpool this summer prizes were offered to school-children for essays on any domestic animal. There is the usual enthusiasm displayed on the subject of animal flesh. One essay supplies what the newspaper report describes as "an excellent contribution on the cow as an article of food": "The cow is one of the most interesting animals of our period. What would we do for our dinner? We would have no mutton chops, steak, or veal, and we would look a little sad, for now pork is so dear. This is not all, but even their feet are useful. We relish them, and think them delightful. It is so nice to pick the delicious meat off the bones." Many papers describe a similar "usefulness" on the part of the pig. One child says: "A pig is a quadruped which is very useful. It

Life is often cruel, and often sordid, but it is not so cruel, and not so sordid, as these children's essays—essays selected in the schools as the best in their standards—would seem to imply. Can we wonder that the march of humanitarianism is slow when little thought is bestowed upon the teaching of its principles, and when every new generation is familiarised as soon as possible with those painful practices which have cauterised the sensibilities of the last? It is the fashion of the day to credit childhood with many savage instincts, but when next we hear of some juvenile act of cruelty, and are inclined with Mr. Pecksniff to pronounce it "very natural," let us stop for a moment to consider whether it is truly natural, or whether it may not be the result of the teaching in inhumanity that we supply. In the Litany we pray to be delivered from hardness and blindness of heart, yet it sometimes seems as if both hardness of heart and blindness of heart we were resolved to impose upon our children.

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supplies us with bacon for breakfast, pork for dinner, brawn for tea, and black puddings for supper. . . . It has very little ambition for itself."

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